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## How We've Improved Intelligence Minimizing the Risk of 'Groupthink'

By John A. Kringen

Nearly one year ago, President Bush's commission on weapons of mass destruction released its report identifying shortcomings in the intelligence community. Many of the commission's judgments dealt with analysis, the discipline I lead at the CIA. The primary criticism was that our analysts were "too wedded to their assumptions" and that our tradecraft -- the way we analyze a subject and communicate our findings -- needed strengthening.

We did not try to hide from the criticism or make excuses. Our assessment of Saddam Hussein's WMD capabilities was flawed. The fact that foreign intelligence services made similar errors in no way absolved us of ours.

We in the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) have been intent on improving our work by addressing the commission's recommendations -- and those of several other self-initiated and external reviews -- head-on. We have taken many steps in the past year to assure the president, Congress and the American people that they can be confident in the integrity of our assessments.

CIA Director Porter Goss has encouraged innovation and creativity in how the CIA approaches its mission. In the DI, we have been diligent in integrating fresh thinking and new perspectives into our analysis. Our in-house training center, the Sherman Kent School, features lessons learned from the Iraq WMD case; they are part of tradecraft courses taken by our analysts, including every recruit entering the DI. Our newest analysts -- and all first-line supervisors -- also have completed classes on alternative analysis and other analytic techniques.

We have established analytic tradecraft units across the directorate, including the office drafting our WMD assessments, that promote the use of alternative and competitive analysis techniques. DI analysts routinely engage academics and outside experts -- last year we did so about 100 times a month at conferences or informal meetings -- to test hypotheses and minimize the potential for being ensnared by "groupthink." And we have a staff that routinely evaluates the quality of our assessments.

We have enhanced the precision and transparency of our written products, making a point of stating clearly and upfront what we know -- and what we don't. Our analysts now offer policymakers greater context on sourcing, including an intelligence asset's

access and biases, thanks to increased information-sharing between the DI and the National Clandestine Service. A computerized system for identifying recalled or modified raw intelligence reports alerts analysts to sources whose information is determined to be faulty.

When Porter Goss selected me as director of intelligence, he expressed his concern that for too long we had concentrated on satisfying the daily demand for current intelligence assessments to the detriment of preparing for the strategic threats and opportunities of tomorrow. What are the implications of rapid advances in technology for U.S. national security? What are the challenges and opportunities posed by Islamic political activism in the Middle East and South Asia? Is there another A.Q. Khan proliferation network out there?

The DI's strategic research program for fiscal 2006 focuses on identifying and assessing long-term trends and emerging foreign threats that go beyond today's headlines. DI analysts also participate heavily in long-term analytic projects led by our colleagues in the intelligence community, especially the National Intelligence Council. The benefit is clear: Our policymakers will have a better idea of what might lie over the horizon.

Even as we strengthen our strategic analytical capabilities, we continue to be the principal source for current intelligence analysis that the director of national intelligence provides to our most senior policymakers. Not only are we helping to staff important DNI components, but DI analysts are also in demand throughout the intelligence community.

The DI is building bench strength with highly qualified recruits to meet the demands of strategic global coverage. We brought in more new analysts in fiscal 2005 than in any year in our history, breaking our previous record by more than 50 percent. More important than the numbers, however, are the education and life experiences our employees bring to the job. Half of our applicants in process claim fluent-to-native capacity in a foreign language, and many have spent significant time in their region of specialty.

Above all, we seek to foster in each analyst a sense of individual initiative, responsibility and ownership, as well as the recognition that providing analysis vital to our national security requires challenging orthodoxy and constantly testing our assumptions. Mastering the fundamentals of tradecraft and building expertise are critical, but we also must aspire to a level of creativity and insight that allows us to look beyond the obvious and flag the unexpected. Only then can we truly fulfill our obligation to help protect the American people.

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